

## Editorial

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We are delighted to present to you the second edition of the *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education's* Collaborative Conference Proceedings and Reflections. After the successful launch of this unique way of engaging with and extending talks and presentations from the annual ALDinHE Conference last year (ALDCon'22), we invited ALDCon'23 participants to interact yet again with the content of the presentations and contribute to the presenters' reflective accounts. This collaborative effort has resulted in another special volume that encourages our readers to revisit the conference and keep its themes and ideas alive.

Like last year, we invited guest editors to join us in the effort to shape and give flow to the eclectic and unruly collection of reflections and responses to the conference sessions. Strengthened by the creative energy of eleven committed colleagues from an array of universities in the UK and Ireland, the task before us felt less daunting than the first time we attempted it in 2022; yet the volume of work and the range of approaches are equally apparent. We retained the three-part collaborative writing format that worked so well last time (Abstract—Community Response—Authors' Reflection), and we maintained the same level of creative editorial freedom to play with the content. Our guiding principle was again ensuring that the articles in this collection would be of value to our readers. We focused on extracting the essence of each conference presentation and capturing the tenor of the discussions and responses from the conference participants, while allowing the authors to reflect and control the story. In some cases, the roles of editors and contributors tangled and blended as we revisited the original presentations and added our own voices to the reflections. Working in the soft unison of multitudinous voices, we strove to create an authentically collaborative space for sharing ideas and extending the LD community's insights and conversations beyond the rooms and corridors of the conference.

The conference itself took place in June 2023, at the University of Portsmouth. The organising committee of the Association of Learning Development in Higher Education for the twenty first time in ALDinHE's history brought the Learning Development community together to collaborate and share perspectives on the changing orientations of higher education. The role of the Learning Developer is situated at the heart of learning, where our members are often aware of the narratives of experience from students, academics and our associate professional services, all of whom are navigating the post-COVID-19 academy, and where engagement trends are ever shifting due to a fraught economic context. It is undoubtedly a time of continuous change in our sector, and colleagues valued this annual opportunity to share notes and perspectives to continue the case for a critical role that Learning Developers play in higher education.

The themes of the conference included exploring transformation and transitions, through and out of HE, with papers examining urgent areas for development related to supporting student retention during a time of higher student drop out. The second conference theme focussed on equality, diversity and inclusion for individuals, HE, and society, where presenters were challenged to look beyond the 'traditional student' who perhaps no longer

exists, as all students are experiencing changes in engagement patterns and limitations on their time brought by unprecedented financial costs of studying, caring responsibilities, and impacts of associated pressures on mental health. The solution to address the above is often to create communities of belonging, which was addressed in the third theme of the conference. Although the cause of creating meaningful spaces of belonging in our universities is easy to support, the realities of doing so in an ever more digital university can be a challenge, especially when it comes to identifying the ways in which staff in advisor roles can support belonging alongside their varied roles.

Many of the presentations and reflections on them collected in this issue thus explore the diverse array of innovations taking place at individual universities, where the pressure on supporting positive student outcomes continues to increase. The role of the Learning Developer in supporting such learning, whilst collaborating with and influencing other key stakeholders including academics and service advisors, is highlighted as critical across many of the reflections, and the various voices participating in these exchanges add to the richness of the collective LD chorus. More details about how the conference was conceived and shaped by the organisers are shared in our guest editorial, written by Laura Barclay and Ian Johnson of the University of Portsmouth, published as an introduction to this issue.

We close by reiterating our profound gratitude to everyone involved in this collective effort, particularly our guest editors and collaborators, without whom this work would not have been possible to accomplish: Chahna Gonsavles, Joy Igiebor, Ian Johnson, Ralitsa Kantcheva, Amy May, Chad McDonald, Maeve O'Dwyer, Amy Sampson, Matilda Stickle, Lisa Wakefield, and Amy West. Also, a big thank you to all the conference participants who actively contributed to these Collaborative Proceedings. We hope that you enjoy this special collection and will be equally inspired to join us in this endeavour again next year.

With best wishes,

Alicja Syska

On behalf of the *JLDHE* Editorial Board and Guest Editors

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The author did not use generative AI technologies in the creation of this manuscript.

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